 Describe some of the digital literacies that you learned about this week. What did you know about these topics before the week began and how have this week’s experiences contributed to your understanding of these digital literacies?

Approximately five years ago, I began incorporating digital media into my science curriculum through the use of Smartboard technology and my laptop computer. At first, I primarily worked with short video segments to make classroom lessons relevant. Videos would be used to show how a science concept applied to the “real world.”

Later, interactive resources were developed and I incorporated them as often as possible. Students seemed to welcome the interactive aspect of digital media because it was more interesting and facilitated understanding of concepts in science. For example, pbslearningmedia.org offered an interactive activity that allowed students to balance objects on a lever of different weights and various distances from a fulcrum.

Lately, I have assigned digital tools that students can use to communicate what they have learned about a topic. I have seen students become more engaged in the learning process when digital tools are used as a form of assessment. The Summer Institute in Digital Literacy gave me exposure to more digital tools. Renee Hobbs, in a Digging Deeper presentation, emphasized that the value of digital literacy is not so much in the tools as in the appropriate application to a learning experience (Hobbs, 2010).

 Now that you’ve had this professional development experience, how are you defining “digital literacy?” **What is your personal perspective on digital literacy** and how has your definition changed or evolved this week? Where possible, make specific connections to readings, conversations, presentations, or activities that were especially important to the evolution of your definition of digital literacy.

My perspective on digital literacy has broadened to include not only the use of many new tools, but the need for appropriate application to my science curriculum. Previous thoughts about digital literacy were focused solely on a digital literacy toolkit. Now I see digital literacy as a framework for learning. We can provide a scaffold of digital literacy so that a student has a comfortable way of interacting with digital media and has a sense of the reliability and validity of each source.

It was obvious from our conversations during the week that some educators have concerns about the safety of digital content for young children. However, it is a reality that the students I teach will have exposure to digital media on an everyday basis. It is their best source of information with regard to world news. A literate citizen will have the ability to discern the informational content of digital media as well as the perspective of the author and the reliability of the information.

In his keynote, Doug Rushkoff presented his opinions about how digital literacy has changed our culture. As a result, I will attempt to move away from only seeking “user-friendly” apps, and will offer the code-academy website to my students to help them learn basic programming. His warning of “program or be programmed” made me think about teaching students (and myself) to understand computer language. Digital literacy now includes the concept of designing software as well as using software.

 **How do digital literacies affect the way you think about** **academic content**? Describe an example of how some specific academic content is affected by changes in the ways we read, write and think with digital media texts, tools & technologies.

Since I teach science, I consider my textbooks as potentially obsolete on the day of publication. Consequently I substitute digital media for textbooks on most occasions. Outdated science has no value, regardless of the student’s age. Without digital media I would be prevented from teaching a relevant science curriculum.

Science learned from a text has limited relevance at the elementary level. While some students can demonstrate understanding of a concept, they may not be able to make connections between concepts they are learning and real-world applications.

Digital resources show students that science is part of the real world. Teaching about habitats, birds, reproduction, or the Bernoulli Principle as related to flight comes to life with a video-cam attached to a pole and aimed at a bald eagle nest. With the internet we can talk about what we see on the Smartboard. We can relate it to Science ideas. We can discuss implications. We can try to predict what it means for our families and ourselves.

Digital media is the best way to keep current on science issues. We watch segments from Nova Science Now, for example, to see the latest research in companion robots.

It is also a way for students to experience how real science and scientists work. Students experience scientists’ discoveries and setbacks, sometimes first-hand. The audio-visual drama that unfolds before them is much more captivating than reading from a text. Bob Ballard’s research vessels transmit in real time. We hear scientists deciding on how to proceed in their exploration based on what they find.

I am so grateful that even though I teach in a low-budget Catholic school, I have digital resources available to my students. We are not able to update written text materials very often because of the prohibitive cost. Digital media is a low-cost way to enhance my curriculum.

 **How do digital literacies affect teaching practices? What** overarching considerations must teachers give, in general, to the interactions of digital literacies and how to teach? Now, focus on your own **pedagogical practice**. How will your new understanding of digital literacy affect the way **you** teach? Describe an example of how you will differently employ a specific teaching practice in your own context as a result of what you learned this week.

I will emphasize my role as a digital literacy mentor or guide to the student. We will be traveling on an educational journey together and the student, with my help, will be creating a digital product that reflects how the student is changed by the educational experience.

My assessments will become even more varied. I make an effort to offer students many different ways to demonstrate what they have learned. My knowledge of digital tools has increased, so I can allow students the opportunity to show learning using many new tools. Some students may choose to write a digital book using storybird. Others may choose to make a movie using Animoto.

I also intend to collaborate with other classes using Wikispaces. A former college roommate is now a computer teacher in the Diocese of Philadelphia. She has volunteered to work with me on a project.

 During the week, you were introduced to **several concerns and promising practices** around digital literacy, digital pedagogy, social networking, and student voice that are circulating among communities of educators, librarians, and youth media specialists. From your perspective, what promising practices show the most potential? Which specific concerns are most pressing? What key takeaways will you champion in your own work setting(s) so that together, you and your colleagues can (a) implement promising practices and (b) address issues of concern?

From my experience at the institute, I see how filmmaking can be empowering to students who see themselves as powerless. My motivation (I discovered at the institute) comes from an activist perspective. My goal for this year is to have each class write and produce a PSA on the topic of global climate change and publish it on our school web site. My emphasis will be first and foremost on the process of researching the topic. I will also encourage other faculty members to become involved in the process of screenwriting and editing. Many of the common core standards will be addressed within the process of filmmaking. My hope is that the project will afford many opportunities for creativity so that learning will be enhanced as students become engaged. We have created many projects during science class as tools for assessment, however I realize now that publishing is essential to validating the process.

Why are these promising practices developing? These practices fulfill a basic need of the student to find a very personal mode of expression. In my personal teaching experience, students become more engaged in the process of learning when classroom activities are relevant to the personal life of the student. Movie-making software allows choice and makes the assignment personally relevant to the author. Digital media is a new and exciting way of engaging a student providing a more stimulating learning experience.

 Consider the list of readings assigned for this course. Briefly summarize 1-2 key insights you gleaned from each cluster of readings (e.g., Digital Literacies in Context, Generating Questions, Instructional Strategies, and Next Steps). How do you see these insights connecting with ideas and experiences shared during the Institute (especially the Keynote and Digging Deeper Sessions)?

CONTEXT:

Rushkoff’s Keynote address was a powerful and thought-provoking presentation. His “program or be programmed” message changed my thinking about how digital media shape our culture.

How will my students (and my own children) learn to sift through the vast amount of information coming at them constantly? Will it be a distraction from reality or give them a more accurate sense of reality? Certainly children and young adults have had a very different view of the world after the Internet became a household commodity.

I was born and raised in a small town, and to experience anything else but the goings-on in that small town, I had to grab a backpack, buy a Eurail pass, and begin a physical trek around the globe. However, some toddlers see as many images before they begin their formal education. After my experience at the institute, I am committed to giving my students tools to evaluate and understand information from the digital world so that they have a means to deal with it in a positive way so as to make them happier, more fulfilled, and better people.

GENERATING QUESTIONS:

Bowker (2010) offered insights about pedagogy revolving around student-formulated questions. He suggested that question-centered pedagogy engages students. In my own pedagogy, common core standards also encourage students to support opinions with evidence.

Wiggins (2013) also advises us to maintain focus on an “essential question.” In my reflections about digital literacy after the workshop ended, I feel that this approach naturally works well with science. The nature of science is such that each activity begins with a question. Answers to questions are evaluated by the quality and quantity of supporting evidence. I had never applied this concept to digital literacy but now I feel that focusing on a question and evaluating evidence is crucial to being literate in the digital age.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES:

Harris and Hofer (2009) proposed a model that gave me pause to re-examine my own pedagogy. They described a method of incorporating information. In my own classroom, students are asked to gather and analyze, synthesize and evaluate. However, I have been lacking in the last part of the model- publishing. Now I realize that this last step helps to validate student work. I will make the digital products available to the school community as often as possible.

Coiro (2011) was helpful in suggesting that teachers should model how to extract information from online text. This method could be helpful especially in middle school, when text becomes more complex.

NEXT STEPS:

I was intrigued with Hobbs’ (2010) comprehensive plan of action, especially when describing literacy as more than using tools. She was appropriately optimistic when calling for “a community education movement for all people in the United States (p.52).”

Hobbs described the process as “not just tool using” but a process of analyzing and creating a new product. This was our experience at the Digital Learning Institute in a nutshell!

* If you are a graduate student, how do these readings connect to ideas in the literature base with which you are engaged?

My research question, although somewhat unclear and far too broad at this point, revolves around relevance and value in elementary science education for every student. My students perceive digital media as extremely relevant, regardless of the quality of the source. My hope is that they become discerning consumers of digital media because a good understanding of science contributes to the making of a good citizen.

* If you are a classroom teacher, librarian, or youth media specialist, what connections do you see among the readings themselves and to your experiences during the institute or in your own work setting?

Digital media sources make science come to life for my students. Whether they are watching scientists from Polar Bear International talk about the bears walking around behind them on the screen, or viewing in real time Bob Ballard’s research team from a camera on a research vessel in the Black Sea, they get the impression that we are not discussing concepts that exist only in books.

 If you had one more day in the Institute, what would you like to learn more about and why? How will you leverage your professional learning network and your new digital literacies to explore your remaining questions over the coming year?

I would have appreciated more time for application of tools to improve my own comfort level. Since this was impossible within our time frame, I hope to reach out to my fellow participants if I have difficulty working with or applying tools. I would accomplish this through our Twitter account and the Wikispace. My cohort member, Jonathan Friesem, is also a willing and able source of support!

Also, I thoroughly enjoyed our challenge of evaluating information on the Internet in order to answer a question. If we had more time I would have been interested in learning about strategies that groups used to navigate the web.

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